

## Ups and Downs of the Salary Survey

State Human Resources published its biennial salary survey, or “market analysis,” July 1. This year, readers will find some extreme fluctuations in labor market values. Those fluctuations likely reflect the chaos in today’s economy.



So, what does it mean to see a big spike or dip in an occupation’s labor-market value? Many managers and employees think the survey’s publication correlates to future pay adjustments. That’s not always true. Several factors come into play during biennial executive planning. Chief among them is the state’s ability to pay.

In this article, we’ll explain how the survey factors into the executive planning process, and we’ll spotlight some of the highs and lows of this year’s survey. State managers and HR representatives can help clarify misunderstandings about the salary survey. Please explain to your agency employees that the survey’s publication doesn’t trigger any changes in one’s base pay. Those decisions result biennially from executive planning, collective bargaining, and legislation.

**Why does State Human Resources conduct and publish this survey?** State law lists several purposes for doing the biennial salary survey (2-18-301, MCA). State Human Resources must:

- identify current “market rates” (midpoints in the competitive pay zone) for all occupations,
- establish FY 2012-13 salary ranges for the nine broad pay bands,
- recommend competitive pay zones for all occupations (within the broad pay bands), and
- send the survey to the Office of Budget and Program Planning.

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The budget office uses the data to calculate funding for jobs that are vacant at the time of the budget snapshot. This year, the budget office will fund vacant positions for the 2012-13 biennium at 75% the occupation's 2010 market rate. The process secures funding for the position. It does not set the pay rate for the person eventually hired into that job.

The biennial salary survey gives us a reference to gauge one facet of Montana state government's competitiveness in the labor market – base pay.

The survey does not:

- capture other facets of state government's overall market competitiveness, like fringe benefits, longevity pay, and job security;
- compare the size of applicant pools or the jobs lost or gained in the labor market between surveys; or
- guarantee automatic pay adjustments based on the published results of the salary survey.

*If you want to find out more about the survey, please attend the question-and-answer session sponsored by State Human Resources:*

- **July 9**
- **9 a.m.**
- **Room 136, Mitchell Building**

The Governor's office may choose to link data from the salary survey to across-the-board pay adjustments. However, that's an executive policy decision reached every biennium, depending on revenue forecasts, collective bargaining, and legislative passage and approval.

**How does state employee base pay compare under the 2010 results?** According to the 2010 salary survey, the median base pay for classified employees in the executive branch is 11% less than their private- and public-sector counterparts in Montana and the four surrounding states. That's 3% higher than the 2008 results. But what's interesting about this year's survey are the extreme fluctuations.

For example, the market midpoint jumped 15% or more for these jobs:

- computer information systems managers
- education program administrators
- lawyers
- medical examiners.

The market midpoint dropped about 15% for these jobs:

- business operations supervisors
- employment counselors
- park wardens
- eligibility technicians
- forestry workers.



This chart shows ups and downs in the market midpoint for certain core occupations in Montana state government. You can view the entire 2010 salary survey on the MINE (Montana Information Network for Employees). Once you are at the MINE home page, select “Personnel,” “HROfficer Resources,” and then select “Market Analyses 2010.”

<b>Some Differences in Market Values Between the 2008 and 2010 Salary Surveys</b>	
Financial examiners (-10.26%)	Operations managers (+5.89%)
Environmental engineers (-2.37%)	Regulatory program managers (+7.38%)
Foresters (-2.23%)	Computer information systems managers (+17.93%)
Agricultural inspectors (-10.34%)	Education program administrators (+20.95%)
Compliance specialists (-3.7%)	Purchasing agents (+9.15%)
Employment counselors (-22.6%)	Training and development specialists (+11.85%)
Rehabilitation counselors (-1.79%)	Management analysts (+5.19%)
Child and family social workers (-2.77%)	Probation and parole officers (+11.88%)
Law clerks (-10.01%)	Right-of-way technicians and specialists (+28.79%)
Archivists (-5.54%)	Auditors (+11.26%)
Environmental engineers (-2.37%)	Accountants (+4.03%)
Facility surveyors (-5.96%)	Tax appraisers (+8.77%)
Fish and wildlife wardens (-16.1%)	Budget analysts (+4.58%)
Highway patrol officers (-7.80%)	Computer systems analysts (+4.77%)
Police and fire dispatchers (-13.56%)	Network systems analysts (+12.54%)

## Medical Marijuana: Focus on the Workplace



Employers are asking about the impact of the Medical Marijuana Act on operations. The Act doesn't really change anything for Montana employers. The only reference to employment says, "Nothing in this chapter may be construed to require ... an employer to accommodate the medical use of marijuana in any workplace."

The Montana Supreme Court has said the Act is "essentially a decriminalization statute" and does not give rise to a right of action against an employer. In a non-precedent decision, the Court upheld the discharge of an employee who tested positive for marijuana. The employee had

been using marijuana for a year and a half in the evenings when not at work, and he had not received any adverse performance evaluations. However, the union contract gave the employer the right to drug test and take disciplinary action.

So, if employees test positive for marijuana, managers may impose discipline according to policy. Drug testing isn't the norm in state agencies. Still, a manager never has to put up with an employee working while under the effects of marijuana. Managers should treat employees who come to work impaired or smelling of marijuana the same as an employee impaired at work by alcohol or illegal drugs.

If an employee with a medical marijuana card uses marijuana to treat a disability, the manager doesn't have to accommodate the use. The employee would be subject to discipline for using or being under the influence of marijuana on the job.

A manager may know or strongly suspect an employee is affected by marijuana on the job. If the manager fails to take disciplinary action, the agency may be liable for any harm the employee causes to himself or others. Managers should also take care to treat all employees the same way.

## PDC Raises Fees – Still a Bargain

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Beginning July 1, the Professional Development Center is raising its fees for training. The increases are small:

- fees for attending half-day and one-day courses go up an average 2%.
- fees for attending longer series go up an average 1.2%.
- fees for “contracted courses” delivered in-house go up an average 0.7%.

These increases evolved through the budget process; the Legislature set the rates in the 2009 session.

Even with the bumps, PDC's fees stay 53% lower than the costs of providers like Skillpath, Career Track, and Associated Employers of Montana. In addition, PDC training “fits” state agencies better than any other content.

In the new fiscal year, managers are scrutinizing every expense, as well they should. But a big part of getting the best bang for your buck means investing in those who'll deliver it – your employees. Keep an eye on PDC courses in order to get the best deal for developing your workforce.

<http://pdc.mt.gov>

